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21 October 1983

MEMORANDUM FOR:

[redacted]
Chief, SOVA/TF/N

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FROM:

[redacted]
Chief, OGI/GD/IT

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SUBJECT:

Trade Between the European USSR and the Soviet
Far East [redacted]

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The two attached blind memoranda constitute our contribution to your response to the 7 October 1983 request from the NIO for General Purpose Forces for data on Soviet west-to-east general cargo shipments [redacted]

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[redacted] If you have any further questions on the subject, please contact [redacted] this office [redacted]

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Attachments:

[redacted]

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GI-M-83-10256 *October 1983* [redacted]

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GI M 83-10256

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SUBJECT: Trade Between the European USSR and the Soviet Far East

OGI/GD/IT [] (21 Oct 83)

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SOVIET INTERNATIONAL TRADE AND SHIPPING ACTIVITYOn the Cape of Good Hope Route

During periods when the Suez Canal is open, Soviet merchant ships rarely use the Cape of Good Hope route. One exception might be freighters with sensitive military aid cargoes seeking to avoid possible surveillance during a Suez Canal transit. At times when the Canal is closed, most Soviet traffic that normally uses the Suez Canal would be diverted to the Cape. The chief exception would be ships using the Panama Canal as an alternative. []

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On the Suez Canal Route

When the Suez Canal is open, it becomes the funnel for most of the trade between Soviet Black Sea and Baltic ports and trading partners in East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, South and Southeast Asia and the Far East. During 1982, the volume of Soviet exports and imports that passed through Suez exceeded 13 million metric tons, about 7 percent of USSR's total seaborne trade. The total included roughly 8 million tons of southbound exports and 5 million tons of northbound imports. The chief component of the exports was 5.3 million tons of petroleum products, destined for customers and clients including South Yemen, Ethiopia, India, and Vietnam. Other Soviet exports included minerals, fertilizers, cement, fabricated metals, and chemicals. []

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The chief Soviet import commodity that transited the Suez was grain -- 1.6 million tons from Australia and Thailand. Other significant Soviet import goods included fabricated metals, ores, sugar, vegetable oils, and rubber -- from a variety of suppliers including India, the Philippines, and Malaysia. []

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Soviet international cargo lines provide a key index to the scope of Soviet shipping activity in the Indian Ocean. They are important both because of their role in carrying Soviet trade to and through the region and because of their role as earners of hard currency from the carriage of cross trade cargoes between non-Soviet ports on their itineraries. As of 31 December 1982, the Soviet merchant fleet operated 71 scheduled international cargo lines. At least 15 of these lines either enter or traverse the Indian Ocean. []

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SEA AND AIR TRANSPORT OF GENERAL CARGO BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN USSR
AND THE SOVIET FAR EAST

There is no evidence that significant tonnages of general cargo are carried between the European USSR and the Soviet Far East by sea; quantities moving by air transport are limited.

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Domestic Sea Transport via the Indian Ocean and the Northern Sea Route

During over 20 years scrutiny of Soviet shipping publications

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members of the International Transportation Branch have never turned up evidence that the Soviets move general cargo from their western sea basins (Black Sea, Baltic, and Northern) to their Far Eastern Ports by ship.

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The only known internal scheduled cargo lines function within specific sea basins such as the Black Sea and Baltic or between specific basins and ports along the Northern Sea Route. The only commodity observed moving from west to east by sea is oil, which the Soviets shipped in annual volumes as high as 300,000 tons from the Black Sea to the Far East during the 1950s. The only cargo detected in east to west traffic via the Indian Ocean is various metallic ores shipped from the Far Eastern port of Tetyukhe to the Black Sea.

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Through ship movements do occur along the Northern Sea Route between the USSR's Northern Basin and its Far Eastern Basin, but their purpose is usually the permanent transfer of a ship between sea basins rather than the movement of cargo. Merchant, river, and naval vessels are moved in this manner.

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The only goods known to move from the western basins to the Far East by way of the Indian Ocean are occasional objects such as floating drydocks and oversized pieces of industrial equipment on barges that have to be towed by sea because they are too big to move by rail.

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Domestic Sea Transport via the Cape of Good Hope Route

This route is used by the Soviets during times when the Suez Canal is closed, as it was from mid-1967 to mid-1975. Its use for inter-basin shipments during those years was no greater than Soviet use of the Suez-Indian Ocean route for that purpose during normal years.

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Cross Country Air Transport

No data are available on the volumes of air freight in either direction between the European USSR and the Soviet Far East. There definitely is some traffic in high priority goods that meet the weight and dimension limits. During 1982, the volume of domestic air freight between all points in the USSR was about 3 million metric tons.

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